

Week 3 – More on Primary Attachment

In previous weeks we have encouraged each of you to look deeply into the experience of coming into this world. We have encouraged the deep introspection into what story you were told regarding your creation and to gauge that next to a deeper investigation into the actual cellular experience of your early life. What you know about the story and what your molecular memory is, can be two different things.

All of our experience is logged into our body in a way that will tell us a deeper truth of our experience. This deeper truth tends to make more sense of who we are as adults, and gives us the necessary information needed to successfully “reparent” ourselves, thus filling in the missing pieces of which our parents were not aware of at the time.

One of the most important distinctions for us to know in this reparenting process is a more complete understanding of the difference between a “bond that tells us we are loved” and “a bond that tells us we are secure.” Thus, how secure were we each in our “love bond” with our parents versus how secure we were in our “attachment bond” with our parents. The attachment bond is a critical development in a little life that will have an enormous impact all the way through an adult life.

The attachment bond is different than the bond of love

Most of us received the care from our parents that told us we were “loved.” Most of us, as little babies, were met with traditional parenting that provided the doting, round the clock care that fed us on a schedule, gave us adequate nutrition, changed our diapers as need. We were provided a comfortable home, we had all the material goods we needed, etc. Most of us were held, soothed, and cared for according to traditional parenting guidelines. Certainly enough to have developed an understanding that we were “loved.” We know this because each one of you are functional adults, able to take care of yourselves, maintain a household, take care of daily tasks, etc. Of course, we are seeing now that this is a limited view of what “love” actually is, but let’s go with it for now.

Unfortunately, this “love bond” is not actually enough to form a “secure attachment.” A secure attachment needs something a bit more intuitive. And this is where most parents, if not all well-meaning parents, are unable to meet the needs in children that allows the formation of an internally secure and loving attachment.

In order to form this internal right relationship with feelings and needs, children need something more than love and caregiving. Children need to be able to engage in a nonverbal emotional exchange with their primary caretaker in a way that communicates their needs and makes them feel understood, secure, and balanced. Children who feel emotionally disconnected or unsure of the relationship with their primary caregiver are likely to feel confused, misunderstood, and insecure, no matter how much they’re loved.

How a secure attachment bond is formed.....

A secure attachment is initially formed with just one person, the primary caretaker, most often the mother. At birth, and then continuing on through the first few years of life, a mother and her child, participate in an exchange of nonverbal cues that make the baby feel understood and safe. Even in the first days of life (and in utero, as we previously discussed), a little baby picks up on mommy’s emotional cues, her tone of voice, her gestures, the feel of her embrace. And the baby in turn

responds to those signals by crying, cooing, nestling in, calming, sleeping. As the baby grows from infant to toddler, these exchanges will develop into him/her responding to the mother's cues by mimicking facial expressions, mimicking gestures, smiling, laughing, pointing, yelling, just to name a few. In turn, the mother is also always reading the cues of her child by watching and listening to the nonverbal cues she has awareness of. And so, as she tends to the needs of the child for food, warmth, and affection, she also uses a nonverbal exchange of her understanding of the deeper feelings of her child. And so, sensing feelings of shame in her child, she responds with an eye gaze and secure embrace that offers acceptance. Or, if she senses fear in the child's body, she offers through her facial expression and touch, safety. Can you see then, that secure attachment grows out of the successful capacity to read and respond in this nonverbal communication around needs and feelings, between parent and baby?

However, this system of feeling and exchanging nonverbal cues and responding with clarity most often does not happen consistently. Because, simply, it didn't happen for the parents when they were babies, and so in unawareness, how would they ever know to develop that skill in their own child. If we would each take our family system and investigate deeply how feelings and needs were abandoned and oppressed by very well-meaning parents.....it would look exactly the same through the generations. With little to no awareness of trying to build an internal relationship that is loving and also secure. And then add to the immaturity and unawareness of the parents the stressors of everyday life one can see clearly that needs and feelings were, at best erratically and imperfectly met.

“Love Bonding” versus “Secure Attachment Bonding”

BONDING

Sense of connection between baby and caregiver

Is task oriented. Baby's needs are tended to...diapers changed, fed, And later...help with homework, Attend recitals, play a game.

Parent tends to the child's needs and maintains own pace. For example, a parent might hurry a child through homework, so that a favorite tv show can be watched.

Parent focuses on future goals, by trying to do everything so that the parent can have the smartest, healthiest child.

SECURE ATTACHMENT BONDING

Sense of **emotional** connection between and caregiver baby and caregiver based on sensing.

Focus is on what is happening at a given moment between parent and child. You sense sadness, and mirror the feeling back through a facial expression that says you understand, maybe with a hug. No words are needed.

The parent adjusts to the child's need for a slower pace, that says, it's ok to take the time needed for your homework. Thus, building into the child an internal relationship with his learning speed and style.

Parent in addition to having expectations also has capacity to live in the moment, meeting the child in the child's experience, reading cues that tells the parent what is happening in the child's inner world.

Things that get in the way of forming a secure attachment

All of our parents, as a result of their own childhood, brought with them a set of feelings and unmet needs of which, frankly, they were not aware as they began the process of parenting. Their own feelings of shame and desire to be good, right, and perfect became the breeding ground for anxiety in trying to meet the needs of you as their child. Therefore, in unawareness, their own feelings and unmet needs went on to inform them as they parented and without intending to, ***parented to ease their own anxiety, rather than having intuition into the needs and feelings of you.*** For those of us that have children, we have done the same in one way or another.

Here are just a few scenarios in childhood that can lead to variations of an insecure attachment. See if you can find areas in which a scenario might speak to your own experience in a way that has resulted in stress, confusion, feelings of worthlessness, and/or lack of safety in your life.

- a health problem with either the baby or the primary caregiver
- an adopted child, who has experienced separation from initial caregiver, to an adoptive caregiver.
- experience of long periods of crying with eyes clenched and bodies tense, may have difficulty accessing the soothing cues of the caregiver.
- any trauma, physical abuse, neglect, disinterest, ambivalence from the caregiver, will of course, lead to the baby forming an insecure attachment to the caregiver.
- a child who only gets attention or its needs met when acting out
- a child who gets misleading or inconsistent boundaries
- a child who is treated as special and receives no boundaries.

Four types of attachment

In this class we are attempting to bring to awareness what happened in your young life so that you can now, in awareness, meet the feelings and unmet needs you experienced even in your earliest days that continues to inform you now....thus reparenting those feelings and needs in a way to ultimately **form a loving secure internal attachment**. In order to do that, you first have to understand attachment and identify the type of attachment you learned and continue to live by.

Here are four types of attachment that are learned early in life and for the most part are continued all the way through an adult's life, and in fact, can be traced through family systems for generations. You learned how to connect from your parents and caregivers. Your attachment history plays a crucial role in determining how you now relate as an adult internally to younger parts of yourself and in all of your external relationships too. We can assess our attachment history by considering our situation now in relationships:

Autonomous (Secure):

- Comfortable in a warm, loving and emotionally close relationship
- Depends on partner and allows partner to depend on them; is available for partner in times of need
- Accepts partner's need for separateness without feeling rejected or threatened; can be close and also independent ("dependent-independent")
- Trusting, empathic, tolerant of differences, and forgiving
- Communicates emotions and needs honestly and openly; attuned to partner's needs and responds appropriately; does not avoid conflict
- Manages emotions well; not overly upset about relationship issues
- Insight, resolution and forgiveness about past relationship issues and hurts
- Sensitive, warm and caring parent; attuned to child's cues and needs; children are securely attached

Dismissive (Avoidant)

- Emotionally distant and rejecting in an intimate relationship; keeps partner at arm's length; partner always wanting more closeness; "deactivates" attachment needs, feelings and behaviors
- Equates intimacy with loss of independence; prefers autonomy to togetherness
- Not able to depend on partner or allow partner to "lean on" them; independence is a priority.
- Communication is intellectual, not comfortable talking about emotions; avoids conflict, then explodes
- Cool, controlled, stoic; compulsively self-sufficient; narrow emotional range; prefers to be alone
- Good in a crisis; non-emotional, takes charge
- Emotionally unavailable as parent; disengaged and detached; children are likely to have avoidant attachments

Preoccupied (Anxious)

- Insecure in intimate relationships; constantly worried about rejection and abandonment; preoccupied with relationship; "hyperactivates" attachment needs and behavior
- Needy; requires ongoing reassurance; want to "merge" with partner, which scares partner away
- Ruminates about unresolved past issues from family-of-origin, which intrudes into present perceptions and relationships (fear, hurt, anger, rejection)
- Overly sensitive to partner's actions and moods; takes partner's behavior too personally
- Highly emotional; can be argumentative, combative, angry and controlling; poor personal boundaries
- Communication is not collaborative; unaware of own responsibility in relationship issues; blames others
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- Inconsistent attunement with own children, who are likely to be anxiously attached

Unresolved (Disorganized)

- Unresolved mindset and emotions; frightened by memories of prior traumas; losses from the past have not been not mourned or resolved

- Cannot tolerate emotional closeness in a relationship; argumentative, rages, unable to regulate emotions; abusive and dysfunctional relationships recreate past pattern.
- Intrusive and frightening traumatic memories and triggers; dissociates to avoid pain; severe depression, PTSD.
- Antisocial; lack of empathy and remorse; aggressive and punitive; narcissistic, no regard for rules; substance abuse and criminality
- Likely to maltreat own children; scripts children into past unresolved attachments; triggered into anger and fear by parent-child interaction; own children often develop disorganized attachment

Typically we can all recognize some of these in at least the first three categories and by this point, most of you are feeling a bit of anxiety in wondering....which type of attachment do I internally hold and externally emit? And yet, here you are in a learning environment that is actively looking, choosing to see clearly what we have not before seen. It's beautiful what we are doing here. And so here is an opportunity to be the secure attachment to the insecure attachment we learned so very long ago. In our attempt to be the security to our insecurity, here are a few ideas to ponder this week.

Grab your journal ...

- Oh wait, did you skip this, and not even start one? :) Can you identify why?
- Is it possible that this is an extension of insecure attachment you learned as a child? Did your parent dismiss you and your feelings, so that they couldn't be bothered to investigate them with you? Is that something you're doing now?

If you are using a journal through this class here are some investigation points ... from the list above....can you identify which one fits you best? Do you sometimes vacillate between more than one...i.e. are you sometimes distant, and then needy?

Once you identify which one you fits you best:

- can you find those same traits in your family system?
- which aspects belong to mom, which to dad?
- can you write some examples?
- investigate the difference of a "love bond" and an "attachment bond" in your system?
- how were your external needs met and how was this called "love"?
- how were you told you were less than, and/or special?
- how were your feelings abandoned, dismissed, told they wrong, never acknowledged?
- remember, that secure attachment is formed from the nonverbal relationship with a primary caregiver that says you are valued and understood. But most parents are giving verbal messages of understanding and acceptance but the nonverbal cues don't match. This sets up a confusion between what a parent says and what the child feels.
- can you find examples of these mixed/double messages in your childhood?
- can you feel the confusion, stress, and insecurity of those messages?
- can you find examples of how you continue to give yourself mixed/ double messages?

Allow yourself to investigate those messages and how those feelings continue to inform you and impact all of your relationships currently, just as they did as a child.

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